

## Everywhere

Today is the feast of the Epiphany, a word that means "The Appearance of God."

And while it is true that the focus of this feast day is celebrating God becoming a human being in Jesus; it is a feast day for many others as well.

It's a feast day for those who, like my bride, say: "I don't need to be in church every Sunday: I experience God as I sit on my surfboard at Diamond Head at dawn."

And it's a feast day not just for surfers but for astrology nuts and New Agers and for seekers of every kind.

That's because today's feast day shouts with an array of voices, in every language, that "God is with us in the humble and the great, in the obvious and in the unexpected, in the neighbor and in the stranger, in the churchgoer and in persons of other faiths." Process Theology.

God is revealed in myriad ways throughout all the universe.

And so, today is a feast day for magicians and spiritualists and animists and scientists and every person who, though not Christian, experiences the divine in any number of ways.

It isn't just Plato, but Saint Paul also, who insists that the divine reality is easily seen in the natural order of things.

Whether that natural order is the perfect wave on a Sunday morning at Diamond Head, or a blade of green grass poking through the concrete at the bus stop outside our gates, God peeks through to us in more ways than we can imagine.

And so this morning, as Matthew tells the story of the Christ child, he begins with magicians from the east - not kings - but Magi - astrologers- who see something in a rising star that convinces them to load up mule and camel for the long journey ahead.

But it isn't only pagan priests who come and see, even the heartless Herod has a role to play in God's revelation.

Did you hear it in the reading?

The Magi don't know where exactly to go, so they make inquiry of the king.

Now, this king is called Herod the great.

He's a stooge for Rome, he cares less about his Jewish ancestry, he seeks only to preserve his power.

Charming fellow, he executes not only his father-in-law and several of his wives, but also two of his sons.

And yet, it is Herod who calls together the intelligentsia of Jerusalem and discovers that the child the Magi seek is born in Bethlehem.

Even the corrupt politician becomes a window through which God is revealed....

The Magi reach their goal, worship and present gifts fit for a king, and once again, the message of Epiphany shines through, this time through Fran Kramer's specialty: dreams; for it is in a dream that the Magi are told to return home by another way.

It seems there are countless ways that God reveals God's-self to humanity.

And so it should be.

The Living God is far more than we can possibly conceive, which ought to have us pause when we find ourselves making judgments about others, or excluding others, or carving out comfortable niches for those supposedly on the inside track.

I have said to you before, and I will say to you again; we ought not to speak of inviting God to come and live in our hearts; rather, we are closer to the

mark when we realize that we, and all of creation, live within the heart of God.

God is to us as the sea is to fish - it is *in God* that we live and move and have our being.

And so you may wonder, that if this is so, if God reveals Gods-self in all manner of ways, to all sorts of people (even to surfers, imagine that!), then why are we here, why do we put on the mantle of Christianity, why do we claim Jesus as the savior?

The poet, reflecting on the Magis' journey, reflecting on the Magis' discovery, has one Magi, now an old man, many years after his journey, saying this in response to these, our questions:

"A cold coming we had of it,  
just the worst time of the year for a journey,  
and such a long journey:  
the ways deep and the weather sharp,  
the very dead of winter.

[We] arrived at evening, not a moment too soon  
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,  
And I would do it again, but set down  
This set down  
This: were we led all that way for Birth or Death?  
There was a Birth, certainly,  
We had evidence and no doubt.  
I had seen birth and death,  
but had thought they were different;  
This Birth was hard and bitter agony for us,  
like Death,  
our death...

What we come to in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is something that completes the incomplete revelations made to astrologers and surfers and New Agers and seekers.

Those incomplete revelations are the giggle from a tickle - in Jesus, we get the belly laugh that come from going deep.

In Jesus, we are allowed to experience the essential nature of God; to learn, face to face, that God is compassionate and forgiving; that God longs for our friendship.

And we also come to see that at the intersection of life and death; of tragedy and hope; of loss and joy; it is at these intersections where God is most present, most active, and most real.

In Jesus, as that old Magi began to realize, Birth and Death meet, Birth and Death become one, and in that unity, Birth and Death are transformed into what we call "eternal Life."

Meaning not some ethereal life lived after we die, not with a harp on a cloud; but a life that shares in the life of the living God: now, today, this moment.

We follow Jesus because we aren't satisfied with mere hints of the divine - we follow Jesus because we wish for a more intimate love affair with God - a love affair that brings with it a love affair with our sisters and brothers here and now - a love affair whose heart beats in eternity.

In following Jesus, we come to see that it is in service that we find reward; in forgiveness of others we find forgiveness for ourselves; and that in opening doors and opening hearts to the poor, the outcast, the widow and the alien, we find the family of God.

Such is the mystery revealed to us through the babe in the crib.

And here is the best news of all.

This belly laugh that is Jesus - the love affair that God invites us into - these aren't limited to one class or one race or one ethnic group.

There's no insiders and outsiders, no select few, with the rest standing dumb in the darkness.

As St Paul says to us today:

"The mystery is that people who have never heard of God and those who have heard of him all their lives (what I've been calling outsiders and insiders) stand on the same ground before God.

They get the same offer, the same help, the same promises in Christ Jesus.

The Message is accessible and welcoming to everyone, across the board."

This, my friends, is the Epiphany of God - thanks be to God!

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